

Elkhart County

March/April 2012

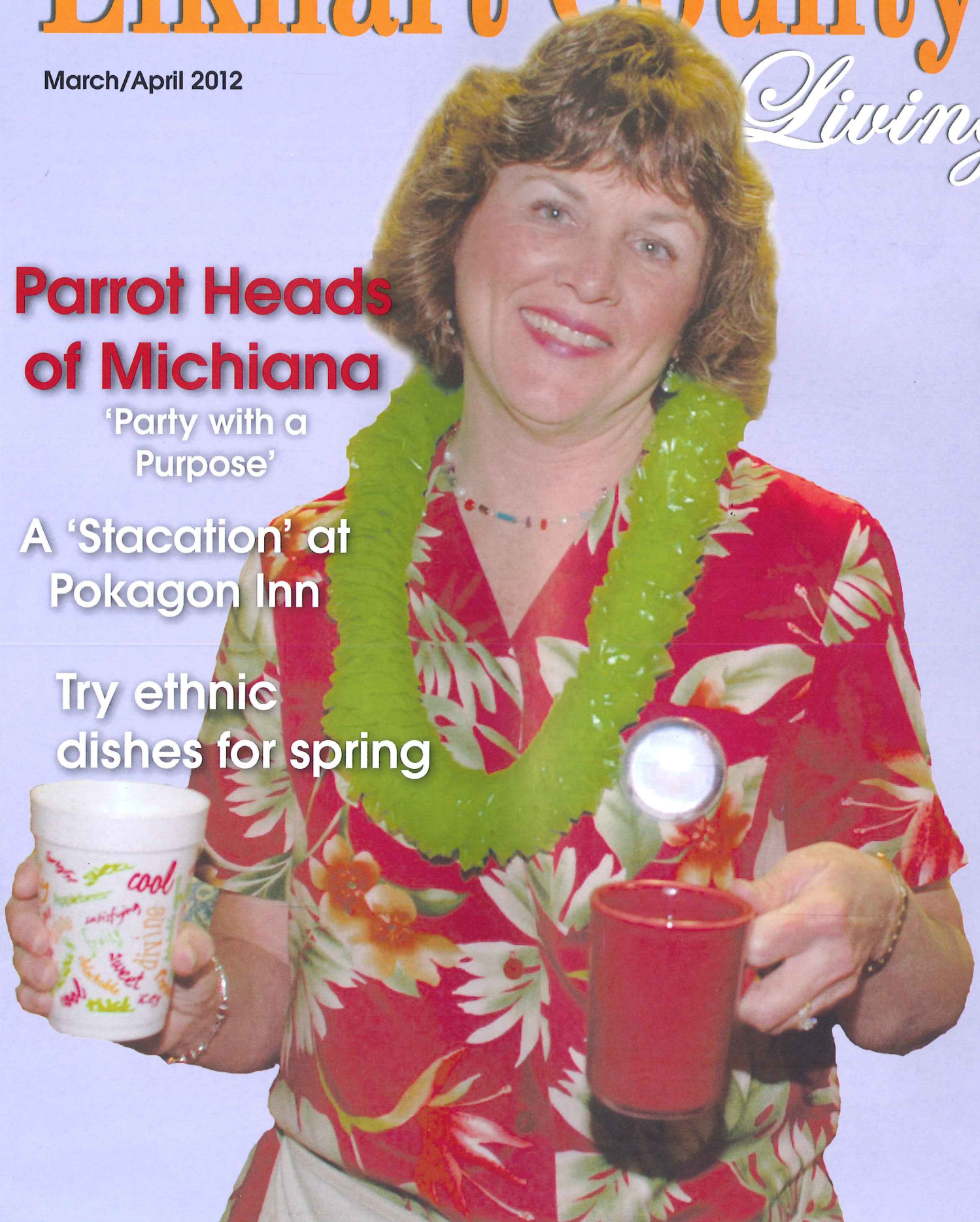
Living

Parrot Heads of Michiana

'Party with a
Purpose'

A 'Stacation' at
Pokagon Inn

Try ethnic
dishes for spring





SOMETIMES, THE GAME THEY LOVE DOESN'T LOVE THEM BACK.

More and more, young athletes are focusing on a single sport and training for that sport year-round — a practice that's led to an increase in Overuse Injuries. Left untreated, overuse trauma to young shoulders, elbows, knees and wrists may require surgery and have lifelong consequences. For information on preventing and treating Overuse Injuries, visit these sites: orthoinfo.org stopsportsinjuries.org



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Elkhart County Living

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On the cover — Lillian Bert of Parrot Heads of Michiana serves drinks at a pancake breakfast in Goshen to raise funds for a teen who needed a heart transplant. **Photo by Mary Swihart.**

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Parrot Heads 'Party with a Purpose'

in Michiana



Buffett fans have fun while helping others

Around 10 years ago, Elkhart resident Carey Bert heard about a gathering of fellow Jimmy Buffett fans in Key West and decided to go.

The only catch — you had to join a group called Parrot Heads in Paradise to attend the annual “Meeting of the Minds” convention. Parrot Heads is a national organization started in Atlanta, Ga., in 1989, that now has chapters across the country and even Canada and Australia.

“I joined a virtual Parrot Head club on the internet, which allowed me to go and attend the convention,” Bert said.

While there, he got a good demonstration of how members of Parrot Head chapters from across the country live out their motto: “Party with a Purpose.” (Parrot Heads, by the way, don’t flock to the convention, they “phlock.”)

While Buffett and other “tropical” music groups were center stage at bars, hotels and beaches across Key West, the “purpose” part was a key element at the convention.

“The national organization held a blood drive,” Bert said. “There was a breast cancer run and there were a lot of Key West and local charities represented down there.”

The national Parrot Head’s web site sums up the group’s purpose: “The organization will engage in activities that are charitable, educational and that promote the general welfare of the community.”

Bert later joined the Fort Wayne Parrot Heads club, which was the closest club to Elkhart at that time.

In 2004, Bert received an email request from a national Parrot Heads officer.

“Someone had asked about starting a club in this area and they wanted to know if I wanted to help out,” Bert said. That prospective Parrot Head was

Jan Caudell and she and Bert were soon in touch. The first unofficial meeting of the new Parrot Heads in Michiana was held at Between the Buns, with Bert, his wife Lillian, Caudell and one other person attending.

“Then a few more came to the first actual meeting and then it took off from there,” Bert said.

Since that first meeting, the club grew to 100 members and now has around 75 members who meet monthly and host fundraisers throughout the year for local charities and causes.

The national club has very specific rules of conduct for its local chapters.

“You have to do an environmental project and another fundraiser (a year),” Bert said. “But a lot of clubs, like ours, do more.”

Parrot Heads in Michiana does four major charity events each year, a pancake breakfast, a food drive for the Michiana Food Pantry and Northern Indiana Food Bank, a soup dinner for Real Services and a tropical dance fundraiser for Petsconnect pet adoption agency.

In between those functions, members suggest charities that are close to their hearts for various other events, including a recent Trivia Night for the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation.

The biggest charity event to date was a pancake breakfast fundraiser at the Goshen Applebee’s for Barrett Younghans in 2010. The event raised \$8,000 for the Goshen teen, then 17, who needed a heart transplant (which he received in February 2012.)



“It was huge,” Bert said. “Almost too huge,” he added with a laugh.

The Parrot Heads in Michiana members have become close friends, Bert said, and members often gather just for dinner or other smaller social outings.

‘There is something going on all the time. You can be busy socially two or three weekends a month if you want to.’

~ Carey Bert, Parrot Heads president

“There is something going on all the time,” Bert said. “You can be busy socially two or three weekends out of the month if you want to.”

While fun is key for local Parrot Heads, when it comes to official club events, the goal really is to “Party with a Purpose.”

“We go to have a good time and it IS a social group, but we do like to have some fundraising aspect to the things we do,” Bert said.

Along with raising money for local charities, Parrot Heads in Michiana members also donate their time. They hand out water at the Sunburst Marathon in Mishawaka that raises money for Memorial Children’s Hospital. They also help out with Toys for Tots.

Core group

Bert said from what he has gathered from other chapters, the number of “core” members in the Michiana

Want more information?
Visit www.parrotheadsinmichiana.org or email info@parrotheadsinmichiana.org



PHOTOS: Pages 16-17, the group at a Jimmy Buffett concert at Toyota Park in Bridgeview, Ill. At left: Lillian Bert volunteering at a pancake breakfast fundraiser for Barrett Younghans at Applebee’s in Goshen. Top left, Mike Johnson at the pancake breakfast. Top right, Mickie Ryan and Patti Nemeth are true “Parrot Heads.” (Photos by Mary Swihart)

chapter who can be counted on to help at functions is very respectable.

“At most of our events, we can count on getting 30 to 40 members to help out,” Bert said.

Even if members don’t physically help, they are quick to open their wallets.

“At most fundraisers, it is our members who are bidding on a lot of the raffle items and buying tickets,” Bert said. “A good share of the money that comes in comes from our members.”

Bert said even members who are working at the events usually buy tickets to get in.

Millions raised nationally

All of the money raised by local chapters across the country really adds up, Bert said.

“As of 2010, national members had raised \$22 million and had 2.7 million volunteer hours that they put in,” he said. “It’s kind of mind boggling.”

Bert said the local club is always looking for new members who want to have fun and help the community.

“We welcome anyone into the club,” Bert said. “It is pretty loose. It is not like we require you to do so many things a year.”

Bert said another great aspect of the club is everyone’s input is welcome on what charities to support.

“We are always open to suggestions,” Bert said.

The pancake breakfast for Barrett

Younghans was the suggestion of Parrot Head member Shelly Sharkey of Goshen, who works with Barrett’s father at Goshen Community Schools.

Shelly joined the club with her husband, Brian, who is a huge Jimmy Buffett fan.

“He’s the party, I’m the purpose,” Shelley said with a laugh. “It’s something we can do together. I enjoy Jimmy Buffett music, but I enjoy the purpose of the whole thing ... volunteering time and raising money for charities and such. Of course it also gives you a whole different circle of friends. We have met some really good friends through Parrot Heads.”

All kinds of members

Shelly and Brian are good examples of the Parrot Head-edness levels in the club. According to Bert and the Sharkeys, there is a big range of Buffet fans in the group.

Brian Sharkey is on the “fanatic” end of the fan spectrum.

Brian saw his first Buffett concert at the Buckeye Lake venue in Ohio as an adult (he got a late start, he admits) and has been making up time with 29 shows under his belt since.

“I go to three shows a year,” Brian said, while, wife, Shelly, has only been to three or four concerts total.

Brian was one of the club’s first members. He saw a notice in the paper about the fledgling group in 2004, attended the first meeting and has been involved ever

since.

He said most of the functions have a cash bar and the atmosphere is always party-like, but that doesn’t mean non-drinkers won’t have a good time.

“Nothing gets out of hand,” Brian said. “It’s just good times. I barely drink at all and I fit right in. I like to wear all the colorful shirts.”

He said people who love the music of the iconic singer/songwriter come from all walks of life.

“It is strange how liking Jimmy Buffett music can draw people together,” Brian said. “The majority of the group is like an extended family.”

And that family extends well beyond Northern Indiana.

Bert and Brian said one of the most amazing things about the Parrot Head organization is the connections that are formed from state to state.

Brian’s favorite venue to hear Buffett concerts is the Riverbend Music Center in Cincinnati.

“The Cincinnati club welcomed me as a part of the family,” Brian said. “I have Parrot Head friends from across the country.”

Bert agreed, explaining that just about anywhere you go in the U.S., you can meet new people or reconnect with old friends.

“When I go on vacation, say in Las Vegas,” Bert said, “I will look at the local club see if they have anything going on. You get to know people from all over the country. It is a great social network.”